Field Notes

In an effort to share some of the natural history observations made during the bottom trawl survey, we have requested that the Chief Scientists on each part of the cruise comment on some of the more interesting catches that were brought aboard the *R/V ALBATROSS IV*.

Impressive Features

This fall field season proved another interesting year for the family Trichiuridae, or cutlassfishes. Like their cousins the snake mackerels (family Gempylidae), the cutlassfishes are usually noticed for their impressive teeth. In terms of the species found in our area, the cutlassfishes tend to have thinner, more elongate bodies with either a missing or reduced caudal fin. The cutlassfishes will also have only one nostril, not two, on each side of the head. Although the data have not been examined more closely, it seems as though each year brings a different mix of species, as opposed to those families that can be reliably found in typical locations each year. With the cutlassfishes, it is almost as if there is a different "featured species" to capture each year. This year saw isolated captures of the crested scabbardfish, *Lepidopus altifrons*. In one instance 16 were captured in a single tow, which is unusual as they are normally captured one or two at a time. A few years ago it was a different species, the Atlantic cutlassfish, *Trichiurus lepturus*, which showed up in remarkably large sizes relative to what we normally observe on the survey. It will be interesting to see if next year there will be yet a different predominant species.

Fish Diversity

Due to an active hurricane season along the south Atlantic coast this past fall, leg II of the bottom trawl survey had the scenic opportunity to occupy stations along the entire near shore coastline from below Cape Hatteras all the way up to the New York Bight area. Usually each leg of the survey covers the entire depth range of the continental shelf but due to safety and weather conditions, plans were changed accordingly since most of the offshore stations had been previously occupied during leg I.

All cruise participants experienced the exhaustion of processing and the excitement of witnessing the species diversity of our inshore stations. During this part of the cruise, over 265,500 individuals from 158 different species were identified and weighed-in at a total of almost 32,000 pounds. Blue runners, lookdown, hogshokers, stargazers, midshipmen, snakefish, lizardfish, pancake batfish, silver jennys, spotfin dragonets and harvestfish are a few of the more exotically named species encountered. On Georges Bank where 16-20 different species may be taken at one location, station 104 caught the most number of species (thirty-three) that came aboard at any one time.

At station 109, sixty-four bluntnose and bullnose rays were sorted and efficiently measured in between the thousands of bay and striped anchovies that were also part of the catch.

Red Drum
At stations 98, 99 and 105, four, large red drum were caught just north and south of the Chesapeake Bay River inlet. They ranged in size from thirty-one to forty-four inches and individually weighed between thirteen and thirty-three pounds. These beauties primarily feed on crustaceans and a variety of fish species. Red drum are known to be prized by shore side recreational anglers with the largest Virginia record setter weighing in at eighty-five pounds.

Stray Cod
There was an unusual catch of small cod at one location off Long Island. At station 52, thirty-three young-of-year cod ranging in size between 3 to 5 inches were caught. They appear to be part of the 2005 year-class.

Georges Bank Haddock
The 2003 year class of haddock made another strong appearance during this year's fall survey. Haddock were caught at 23 stations on George's Bank. Over three quarters of these fish were age-two. The northern edge of the Bank had the highest number of individuals with 2,944 and 1,445 individuals caught at stations 232 and 226 respectively. The excitement on deck when observing and sampling this year class has been contagious to all on board the survey. This year class of haddock should start to be available to the commercial fishery over the next year or so.

Rare Species Encountered
At Station 165, three species not commonly captured during our surveys surprised us. One spotted tinselfish, two keelcheek bass, and two silver rags were mixed in among the more common species. These unusual species spark a unique exhilaration as some scientists see them for the first time while others recall previous captures.

Memorable Lobster Catch
The fourth leg of the fall survey was cut short due to bad weather in the Gulf of Maine. After six days of sampling, we were forced back to Woods Hole by a quickly approaching storm. Fortunately we were able to complete all of the stations in Canada and downeast Maine before heading in. One catch worth noting was a station just south of Nova Scotia where we pulled up 140 pounds of male and female lobsters; a total of 144 individuals! We were also seeing haddock in nearly every tow in that area which is always nice to see.

Elusive Pollock
Leg V was a mop up trip mainly covering the western Gulf of Maine and the Great South Channel. Overall the catches seemed smaller than prior years with very few checker buster tows except when Spiny dogfish, pollock and Atlantic herring were encountered. Noticeably missing were large catches of Acadian redfish and Atlantic cod.

The three largest (over 220 pounds) catches of pollock occurred in the Western Gulf of Maine closed area off from Gloucester, MA at stations 304, 306 and 312. One hundred and twenty-eight pollock weighing in at 1050 pounds were caught at station 306. This represents the largest pollock tow in this area during one of our surveys since 1980.

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